

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1188

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6357

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: CHAMOUN-LED MARONITES ALLEGED TO WANT PERMANENT SEPARATE
ENCLAVE

1. GHASSAN TUEINI, PUBLISHER OF AN-NAHAR AND MIPISTER OF
LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM, INDUSTRY AND PETROLEUM,
CROSSED LINE FROM MARONITE SECTOR FOR FIRST TIME IN THREE WEEKS
AND LUNCED WITH ME TODAY, JULY 17.

2. TUEINI, WHO IS GREEK ORTHODOX AND TRIES TO STEER MIDDLE
COURSE IN LEBANESE POLITICS, SAID THAT HIS STAY OF OHREE WEEKS ON
MARONITE SIDE HAD ENABLED HIM TO GET A GOOD FEEL FOR CURRENT
MARONITE THINKING. MOST DOMINANT MARONITE FIGURE TODAY IS
CAMILLE CHAMOUN, HE STATED, AND CHAMOUN'S VIEWS ARE
PARAMOUNT AMONG MARONITES. CHAMOUN IS DETERMINED THAT
SEPARATE MARONITE ENOITY SHALL REMAIN AND NEVER AGAIN BE
DISSOLVED. MOST HE WILL SETTLE FOR IF LEBANON IS EVER RECONSTITUTED
AS A MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN NATION IS MARONITE AUTONOMY.

3. ACCORDING TO TUEINI, CHAMOUN COULD NOT RPT NOT CARE LESS
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ABOUT MARONITES OR OTHER CHRISTIANS LIVING OUTSIDE OF MARONITE

ENCLAVE. TO HIM, SURVIVAL OF COHESIVE, SEPARATE MARONITE UNIT SHOULD BE PRIMARY AND PERMANENT OBJECTIVE OF MARONITE LEBANESE POLICIES. QUESTION OF ECONOMIC VIABILITY DOES NOT RPT NOT EVEN ARISE IN CHAMOUN'S THINKING, ACCORDING TO TUEINI. MARONITE LEADERS, HE CONTINUED, THINK MAINLY OF THE PRESENT.

4. TUEINI SAYS CHAMOUN'S CURRENT AIM IS TO OBTAIN SOME FORM OF INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEE FOR AN INDEPENDENT MARONITE PRESENCE IN LEBANON. MARONITES VALUE SYRIAN SUPPORT, BUT ULTIMATELY OUTSIDE GUARANTEE MUST COME FROM ELSEWHERE THAN DAMASCUS. THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS AS YET, ACCORDING TO TUEINI, THAT MARONITES PERCEIVE PITFALLS IN THEIR CURRENT CLOSE EMBRACE WITH SYRIANS.

5. COMMENT: AS DEPT IS WELL AWARE, CHAMOUN IS A THROWBACK TO THE 19TH CENTURY, AS REFLECTED IN HIS DESIRE IN EFFECT TO REVERT T O SOMETHING LIKE FRENCH UNDERTAKING TO PROTECT MARONITES OF MOUNT LEBANON AT ALL COSTS. TUEINI BELIEVES, AS I HAVE HEARD ALLEGED FROM OTHER SOURCES, THAT CHAMOUN STILL HAS ASPIRATIONS TO BECOME LEBANON'S NEXT PRESIDENT. TUEINI THINKS CHAMOUN MAY HOPE THAT SOMEHOW ON SEPT. 23, WHEN FRANGIE STEPS DOWN FROM THE PRESIDENCY AND SARKIS TAKES OVER, SARKIS WILL BE UNABLE TO MARSHAL THE NECESSARY MAJORITY VOTE IN PARLIAMENT. CHAMOUN WOULD THEN TRY TO MANEUVER THIS SITUATION TO HIS ADVANTAGE. THIS SCHEME SEEMS FAR-FETCHED TO US. WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT 76-YEAR-OLD CHAMOUN, WHO PROBABLY HAS NO SUPPORT OUTSIDE MARONITE RANKS, COULD PULL SOMETHING LIKE THIS OFF. SEELYE

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